

Chapter 8.0

Public Involvement and Agency Outreach

From the initiation of the project, public involvement has had an essential role in the design and planning of the Purple Line. The Purple Line public involvement program is based on several core principles:

- Local residents and stakeholders have the right to a voice in the planning process.
- Planning and engineering professionals, no matter how well intentioned or how skilled, do not have the knowledge and understanding of local issues and concerns of local stakeholders.
- Active participation from the public creates a healthy debate about the project, better informing planners and leading to projects that enhance communities.

The goal of the public involvement program is to engage anyone who has a stake in the project—residents, community leaders, businesses, elected officials, local jurisdictional staff, developers, and environmental and other advocacy groups. One early step in the program was to educate a corridor that already uses transit heavily on modes new to the region (light rail transit and bus rapid transit). Throughout the project, MTA has strived to create, encourage, and maintain a dialogue with stakeholders about the planning and design of the Purple Line.

8.1 Public Involvement Program

MTA has used a wide range of outreach techniques—newsletters, a project website, e-mail blasts, brochures and fact sheets (both on the project as a whole and on specific topics), a Facebook page, and tables at events such as community fairs and festivals. But the core of the outreach program has always been face-to-face meetings.

Some of the key design refinements that have come out of meetings with stakeholders include the shift of the aerial crossing of the intersection of Kenilworth Avenue and East West Highway into the median of Kenilworth Avenue, the shift of the Capital Crescent Trail to the south side of the transitway in the Georgetown Branch right-of-way, the shift of the transitway to the south side of Riverdale Road, and the redesign and programming of the Lyttonsville and Glenridge storage and maintenance facilities. These modifications were all

proposed to minimize impacts to local communities.

MTA has held different types of public meetings, choosing the appropriate format for the topic of the meeting and the stage of the project. The three main types of meetings are described below.

8.1.1 Open Houses

Open House meetings allow for an informal self-paced review of project information on display boards, with many Purple Line staff members on hand to talk to attendees.

To support large project-wide discussions, MTA held large, informal open houses. This was the initial tool used during scoping when MTA was looking at broader topics, such as what modes of transportation to consider. The open houses supported discussions from a broad corridor-wide perspective that clarified the purpose and need of

the project, allowing for better informed decisions on the scope of the project.

Open houses have been held periodically to present and discuss the project as a whole. Members of the public were invited by corridor-wide mailings and announcements on the website. To maximize attendance, four to five open houses were held in convenient locations in the 16-mile corridor and each meeting covered the whole project. These meetings have been well attended throughout the project, with approximately 350 participants at the first round of meetings, and ranging from 500 to 800 attendees over the five rounds of meetings held since then.

8.1.2 Community Focus Groups

During the development and screening of alternatives, MTA created a forum called Community Focus Groups. The 16-mile corridor was divided into six geographic areas. Community and civic associations in each area were invited to send a representative to the meeting, with the intent that the alignment options through a focused area could be discussed and compared by local stakeholders. It became apparent that two of the groups covered too large an area or included areas that were too dissimilar; they were each split in two.

By asking for a representative from each community organization, MTA was aiming for a group that was small enough to have a discussion around a table, rather than a formal presentation where people might be reluctant to voice opinions or concerns. Multiple rounds of these meetings were held between 2005 and 2009. At the meetings, MTA built relationships with community members, which allowed for valuable dialogues about the project, the proposed plans, and the local communities through which it would run. MTA was not just providing information to the community but also learning from them about their concerns and obtaining their input and feedback. As a result of these Community Focus Groups, MTA changed and fine-tuned plans. At these meetings, various alignments were debated by residents and, in one case, an entirely new option—the Silver Spring/Thayer tunnel—was proposed. This new option had not been considered by project planners, and it was

subsequently added to the alternatives under consideration. It was beneficial to have residents of different neighborhoods consider the relative impacts and benefits of alignments through their own and each other's neighborhoods. The discussions brought out relevant issues, allowing them to be considered in the design process. The project team learned about topics such as student pedestrian routes, which could only have been learned from local residents. MTA documented all comments and questions at these meetings and posted them on the website, providing answers where appropriate.

8.1.3 Neighborhood Work Groups

After the selection of the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) by the state of Maryland in August 2009, MTA created a new format for community meetings. Because the focus of discussion was now on refining the Locally Preferred Alternative, MTA wanted meetings that would focus on smaller design areas. To facilitate this, MTA created Neighborhood Work Groups. Groups were created for each of the 21 stations and the following other topics:

- CSX Corridor
- Capital Crescent Trail
- Wayne Avenue
- Bonifant Street Businesses
- University Boulevard
- Kenilworth Avenue
- Ellin Road

Members of the public were invited through newsletters, the website, and sign-up sheets to sign up for the Neighborhood Work Groups. The meetings focused on detailed issues such as individual station design, station access, or streetscaping on a block-by-block basis.

At each of the Neighborhood Work Group meetings questions and comment from the public were recorded. Written responses to the questions were developed and posted on the Purple Line website along with the presentation materials and mapping shown at the meetings.

These three types of meetings, each a different scale, have been the backbone of MTA's outreach program; however, many other forums and tools were

used. MTA met over 200 times with individual community or civic associations to provide project briefings or to address specific issues. Some of these meetings were requested by MTA, and others were the result of invitations from the community groups themselves.

In total, Purple Line outreach staff attended over 900 meetings with local residents, business owners, county staff, elected officials, and other stakeholders.

8.1.4 Newsletters, Fact Sheets, Brochures, and Electronic Media

Newsletters on the Purple Line are issued periodically to provide project news and updates and to announce upcoming public meetings. The project mailing list includes over 66,000 names. Seventeen newsletters have been distributed to date.

In addition, MTA has developed an assortment of fact sheets and brochures. These have included general project information as well as more specific topics. Titles include:

- *What is Light Rail?*
- *Staying Connected*
- *Your Rights as a Property Owner*
- *The Capital Crescent Trail*
- *Supporting Local Businesses*
- *Traction Power Substations*

Other brochures have provided explanations of field activities such as surveying and geotechnical borings. MTA has developed and distributed these brochures in English and Spanish.

Newsletters, fact sheets, and brochures are posted on the project website (www.purplelinemd.com); paper copies were available at public meetings.

The project website is used to share information and get feedback. The website includes project information, public meeting announcements, electronic versions of the AA/DEIS and related Technical Reports, mapping of the alternatives, information on special reports and studies, and a link to join the project's mailing list or contact project staff members. The presentations and mapping shown at public and community meetings are also posted on the website. Questions and

comments asked at Community Focus Groups and Neighborhood Work Groups are recorded and posted, with responses, as well. Materials are usually posted within two days after a meeting. The project website is updated regularly and is available in English and Spanish.

In July 2012, MTA launched a project Facebook page (www.facebook.com/marylandpurpleline) to engage the public on the project, share information about the project area, and provide information on transit projects and initiatives. The Facebook page is used as a forum for discussions, to share project updates and news, and, in the future, will provide information on construction activities.

In January 2013, the Purple Line Project began to use Twitter to connect with the public in real-time. The public involvement staff tweets project updates and pictures from Purple Line events as they happen. Twitter is also used to provide the latest information on transit, transportation, and news from the Purple Line corridor.

Because of the large Hispanic population in the corridor, the newsletter, project brochures, and website are available in Spanish. Separate mailing lists (electronic and postal) are maintained for people who have requested project materials in Spanish.

8.1.5 General Community Outreach/Neighborhood Events

In spring 2010, the MTA launched a general community outreach effort. The public involvement staff set up information tables at over 25 community events (such as fairs, festivals, and farmers markets) and at various community centers (such as shopping centers), providing general project information, newsletters, fact sheets, brochures, and sign-up sheets for the mailing list. Where appropriate, Spanish-speaking staff attended these meetings.

8.1.6 Targeted Outreach for Specific Issues

The MTA has met with many local communities regarding specific issues. Some of these meetings, or series of meetings, have been initiated by concerned stakeholders; such as when residents, learning about

proposed project plans through the regular outreach program described above, ask the MTA to meet with them on a particular topic. The MTA has done this with many communities in the corridor. For example, in Woodside when local residents had more questions about the proposed Capital Crescent Trail on the north side of the CSX right-of-way the MTA met several times with them, including a Saturday morning site visit to walk the area.

In other situations the MTA has initiated specific outreach to local residents and businesses to present proposed changes to the alignment. The modifications made to the LPA included in the Environmental Re-evaluation were the subject of additional meetings with the potentially affected community members. These alignment modifications were not incorporated in the Preferred Alternative until the outreach efforts were completed and the MTA was comfortable that the community was generally accepting of them. On Kenilworth Avenue meeting were held with the Town of Riverdale Park, with local business associations, the Central Kenilworth Avenue Revitalization group, and residents and businesses in the area. Along Riverdale Road where the proposed shift of the alignment would result in the displacement of 22 homes the MTA hand delivered invitations to meetings; worked with the civic association, East Pines Citizens Association, and local elected officials to discuss these proposed modification and get input from the affected residents and homeowners. For more information see the *Purple Line Re-evaluation* (2012).

8.2 Outreach to Traditionally Under-represented Stakeholders

The communities in the Purple Line corridor include a wide range of demographics and income levels and a wide range of levels of civic engagement. Some communities have strong active community associations and people comfortable with taking an active role in community and government issues, while others do not. When MTA initiated the Community Focus Group effort, it soon became apparent that while attendance at some meetings was large enough to require skilled

facilitation to ensure opportunities for all to participate, other meetings were very sparsely attended. To encourage more participation, MTA reached out to local elected officials, local planners, churches, community groups, and schools to invite participation and solicit help in identifying community leaders. In some neighborhoods, announcements of meetings were hand-delivered to residents. These activities have been successful in engaging community members so that the project now includes meaningful participation throughout the corridor.

Much of the general outreach effort, such as attendance at community fairs and festivals, has been aimed at engaging those communities where MTA has seen less engagement in, and knowledge of, the project. One community that is traditionally difficult to engage is apartment dwellers. MTA has worked with Impact Silver Spring, a community organization, to increase participation by residents of large apartment complexes. Impact Silver Spring also helped with outreach to other, smaller groups, such as Ethiopian and Vietnamese immigrants, by hosting meetings and providing translation where necessary.

8.2.1 Hispanic Community

The Purple Line corridor contains a large Spanish-speaking population, particularly in Langley Park. MTA was concerned that this community would not be engaged in the public participation process, and early outreach efforts validated this concern. MTA has engaged Spanish-speaking outreach staff and has partnered with advocacy groups in the area such as CASA de Maryland, Impact Silver Spring, and the Takoma Langley Crossroads Development Authority to reach this community and others.

The project website, newsletters, and brochures are fully translated into Spanish, and MTA maintains a dedicated telephone line for Spanish-language calls. Bilingual staff members are present at Purple Line community meetings and are available to translate the presentations and discussions.

The Executive Summary of the FEIS has been translated into Spanish and is available on the website and at local libraries.

8.2.2 Small Businesses

In January 2012, MTA initiated a formal business outreach program targeted at the substantial number of small businesses in the corridor. This program is intended to educate owners of businesses located within the Purple Line corridor about the project and to engage them in the project's planning and design process. Many of these businesses are Hispanic-owned, and, for this reason, this effort has been led by the bilingual outreach staff.

Members of the outreach team have a plan to visit every business along the alignment. As of January 2013, over 900 businesses had been visited. After this initial outreach, MTA will hold geographically organized business meetings. The meetings will focus on issues of concern specific to businesses.

The Takoma Langley Crossroads Development Authority also has been a partner with MTA in outreach to the local business community. They have several kiosks in the corridor, and they allowed MTA to use them for posters about the Purple Line.

MTA has researched best practices in supporting small businesses through roadway or transitway construction. The MTA will develop and implement a Business Construction Impact Mitigation Plan based on this research. In speaking to other transit agencies, MTA has heard repeatedly it is most important to establish relationships and trust with the local businesses. Communication will be a critical factor in how well a small business handles the disruption resulting from the Purple Line construction. The business outreach conducted by the MTA is the initial step of coordination and communication that will be the basis of the impact mitigation efforts during construction.

MTA is working with state and county agencies to identify and bring together existing resources that can support and strengthen small businesses.

8.3 Local Jurisdiction Coordination

Local jurisdictions have been actively engaged in the Purple Line. The project is equally split between Montgomery and Prince George's Counties and passes through or adjacent to five incorporated

cities or towns—Chevy Chase, Takoma Park, College Park, Riverdale Park, and New Carrollton. MTA has been meeting regularly with the counties, bi-monthly in the early phases of the project, and monthly since the project moved toward and into preliminary engineering. Meetings with the cities and towns are held on an as-needed basis. Representatives of the local jurisdictions attend the project's community meetings.

The engagement of local jurisdictions and agencies has been part of the planning and design process, including the relocation and redesign of the Lyttonsville Yard, the coordination for the Silver Spring Library station (which will be surrounded by the new county library), the inclusion of bicycle and pedestrian amenities, and the sidewalk to be provided through the underpass in Bethesda.

8.3.1 Project Team Meetings

As mentioned in Chapter 2.0, MTA created a Purple Line Project Team, composed of local planners, state and county agencies, and elected officials. MTA has been holding regular meetings with the Project Team twice a year throughout the study, and these meetings were used extensively as a forum to evaluate and review proposed alternatives.

The Project Team includes representatives from the following state, local, and regional agencies and governments:

- Federal Transit Administration
- Maryland Department of Transportation
- Maryland Department of Planning
- Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission—Montgomery County
- Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission—Prince George's County
- Maryland State Highway Administration
- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
- Montgomery County Council
- Montgomery County Department of Transportation
- Prince George's County Council
- Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

- Municipalities of Takoma Park, College Park, Riverdale Park, and New Carrollton

Topics of discussion at the Project Team meetings have included updates and discussions on public involvement, alignment alternatives, station locations, work plan, FTA requirements, project schedule and status, traffic studies, project newsletters, project website, travel forecasting, cost effectiveness, funding issues, and the project development process. The Project Team meetings have been helpful in obtaining input on alternatives, options, and refinements to the project.

8.4 Agency Coordination

Coordination and outreach to the federal, state, and local agencies has been ongoing since the scoping meetings held in September 2003 at the beginning of the Purple Line study. Early (pre-DEIS) coordination activities are described in the AA/DEIS. Since the AA/DEIS public hearings, continued involvement and coordination with various federal, state, and local environmental and regulatory agencies has been part of the FEIS development phase of the project.

MTA continues to work with the resource agencies, attending Interagency Review Meetings to identify and evaluate resources as well as provide agency feedback to the project engineering staff in the development of the Preferred Alternative. Interagency Review meetings are an opportunity for various federal and state agency representatives to hear and share input on MDOT projects. Agencies which regularly attend include FTA, Federal Highway Administration, Maryland Historical Trust, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Department of the Environment, and the Maryland Office of Planning.

In addition to the Interagency Review Meetings, MTA has conducted coordination with the following federal, state, and local agencies and entities regarding the Purple Line project:

- National Park Service
- National Capital Planning Commission
- Montgomery County Department of Transportation
- Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
- Maryland Department of Transportation
- Maryland Historical Trust
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources
- Maryland Department of the Environment
- State Highway Administration
- University of Maryland
- Montgomery County
- Prince George's County
- Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission—Montgomery County
- Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission—Prince George's County
- Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission

Several important alignment decisions have been made as a result of the agency coordination process, including the following:

- The proposed roadway lane configuration and the decision to locate the transitway in the median of Kenilworth Avenue was the direct result of MTA working with several local agencies to develop the best possible outcome. Working with the Maryland State Highway Administration and Prince George's County, project staff assessed the future traffic conditions and required real estate acquisition needs of what was included in the LPA and developed the current alignment that avoids several private property displacements and preserves access to several local businesses with a reduced overall footprint.
- The cooperation of Montgomery County Department of Transportation, Montgomery County Council, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission—Montgomery County, and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, the support of a U.S. congressman, and the active participation of the local community, were all important elements in the successful modification of the plans for the Lyttonsville storage yard.

8.5 Public Hearings and Comment Period on the AA/DEIS

After the release of the AA/DEIS on October 17, 2008, the general public, and resource and regulatory agencies, were offered the opportunity to review and comment on the AA/DEIS during the FTA public review process, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. This process included four public hearings held in the project area and a 90-day public and governmental comment period from October 17, 2008 through January 14, 2009.

Over 750 people attended the Purple Line public hearings in November 2008. Four different hearings were held throughout the Purple Line corridor, and at each one an Open House allowed attendees to review project information and talk to Purple Line Project Team members. Over 3,300 comments were received on the AA/DEIS in the form of written and oral testimony at the public hearings, as well as letters, faxes, and emails. Twelve separate petitions were submitted with thousands of names. Comments were provided by elected officials, community organizations, government and regulatory agencies, residents, special interest groups, and non-profit organizations. The most frequent topics of public comment are summarized in Table 8-1. Appendix A—AA/DEIS Comments and Responses provides a more detailed discussion of the comments, and includes the responses to the comments.

Comments in support of the Purple Line included a wide range of topics, most commonly the environmental benefits and improved accessibility in the region that would be provided by the Purple Line. Many comments simply stated support for the project. Comments supporting any particular aspect of the proposed project were included in this category. There were also some comments opposed to the Jones Bridge Road alignment. Many comments noted that the Georgetown Branch right-of-way was purchased for use as a transit right-of-way.

Comments opposing the use of the Georgetown Branch right-of-way for the project made up the

second largest category. The loss of trees and the addition of a transitway adjacent to the trail (and behind residences) were the most common reasons cited. There were concerns about safety of trail users, noise and visual impacts. Many comments stated the importance of the right-of-way as an environmental and recreational resource for this part of Montgomery County.

General opposition to the project was most often based on concerns about cost, a lack of need for the project, and adverse environmental impacts. Other comments stated that the project would bring additional development in the corridor.

Table 8-1. Summary of AA/DEIS Public Comments

Topic	Number of Comments Received
Support for the Purple Line	4,950 (1,570 individual comments and petitions with 3,380 names)
Opposition to the use of the Georgetown Branch right-of-way for transit	1,170
Opposition to the Purple Line	190
Support for Other Alternatives	220
Support for Jones Bridge Road alignment	200
Concerns about environmental impacts	150
Opposition to a surface alignment along Wayne Avenue	120
Support for BRT	100

Note: The numbers presented here have been rounded. In addition, many comments addressed more than one topic.

While some comments noted general support for the Jones Bridge Road alignment, other comments focused specifically on the potential for the Jones Bridge Road alignment to better serve the Medical Center area, which is located near the western terminus of the Jones Bridge Road alignment.

In comments opposing a surface alignment on Wayne Avenue in Silver Spring the concerns cited were loss of parking, adverse traffic impacts, property impacts, safety and slow transit operations. This topic includes comments supporting a tunnel and opposing a station at Dale Drive. Opposition to the station at Dale Drive was most often because of concerns that the station area would be rezoned for denser development.

Support for BRT was in some cases, based on support for the Jones Bridge alignment, but other commenters stated that BRT would be more cost effective, have higher ridership and have less negative effects on adjacent communities.